DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 482 928 TM 035 404

TITLE	Using Educational Research and Development To Promote Student Success. 2001 Annual Report.
INSTITUTION	Regional Educational Lab. Network.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	2001-00-00
NOTE	37p.
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: http://www.relnetwork.org.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Academic Achievement; *Educational Research; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; Research Projects; *Research Utilization; Research and Development
IDENTIFIERS	*Regional Educational Laboratories

ABSTRACT

The Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) program was established more than 30 years ago, and 10 RELs have been working at school sites in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and U.S. territories since 1985. The labs work on regional and national education issues, applying what they learn from their own and others' research and development projects to spur meaningful school change. The stories and tables in this report present an overview of the challenges the RELs are facing during the 2001-2005 contract as well as their strategies for addressing these challenges. Across the United States the labs are partnering with schools and districts to build capacity for school improvement and high student achievement. Because this was the first year of a new contract, many of the stories in the report describe early phases of research and development project. Other stories draw on work begin in a previous contract period that laid a foundation for additional research and development to be carried out through the contract period. Projects described have taken place at: (1) AEL and the AEL Higher Education Co-Venture; (2) the Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University; (3) the Laboratory for Student Success; (4) Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning; (5) the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory; (6) the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory; (7) Pacific Resources for Education and Learning; (8) the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory; (9) the Regional Education Laboratory for the Southeast (SERVE); (10) WestEd. Also described are the way the RELs network for success and the national leadership areas served by each of the RELs. (SLD)

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REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL LABORATORIES

Using Educational Research and Development to Promote Student Success

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2001 ANNUAL REPORT

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RELs Promote Student Achievement Through Research and Development

The past two decades have given rise to many improvements in schools. The implementation of standards, stronger assessment practices, and new models of successful schools are evidence of the deliberate, continuing process of improvement. Students' educational expectations have risen during the past 20 years. High school students are taking not only more courses, but more difficult courses than their counterparts of the early 1980s. Parents, too, have increasingly high expectations for all students and schools. However, gaps in achievement persist. Poor and minority students are more likely to attend low-performing schools. In the nation's highest poverty schools, an estimated two-thirds of students fail to meet even minimum standards of achievement. More troubling, recent studies indicate the achievement gap between white and minority students that had been narrowing during the past decade is beginning to widen again.

For example, a July 2001 report released by the National Center for Statistical Analysis shows that throughout elementary and secondary school, blacks scored lower overall on mathematics and reading tests than whites. And the recently released *Fourth Grade Reading Highlights 2000* notes that white and Asian Pacific Islander students had higher average NAEP 2000 reading scores than black, Hispanic, and American Indian peers. The NAEP 2000 reading scores also indicate that at the fourth-grade level, although the percentage of students at the "proficient" and "above-proficient" levels has increased slightly, lower-performing students have actually lost ground since 1992, while the higher-performing students showed gains.

What is a High-Performing Learning Community?

High-performing learning communities produce high levels of achievement for all students and are able to sustain these high levels of achievement as their environment changes and challenges arise.

Schools and districts that are high-performing learning communities are characterized by having:

- a shared vision that links students to high learning standards;
- a supportive organizational structure that organizes space, time, and resources to maximize student learning;
- a challenging curriculum and engaged student learning that reflects high standards in all content areas and high expectations for all students' learning;
- a collaborative culture that is supportive of continuous improvement by students, teachers, and other adults; and
- proactive community relations that encourage schools to become not only a community resource, but a place where parents and community members are active participants in student learning and in the life of the school.

Source: Berman, P., Ericson, J., Aburto, S., Lashaw, A., & Thompson, M. (1998). *Understanding high performance learning communities: A literature review*, Emeryville, CA: RPP International.

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In response to the continuing achievement gap, the Office of Educational Research & Improvement (OERI) in the U.S. Department of Education has given the ten Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs) this charge for the years 2001–2005: to support "the efforts of states, districts, schools, communities, institutions of higher education, and others to transform low-performing schools" into high-performing learning communities that meet the needs of all students. The RELs will deepen their knowledge about *how* the transformation of low-performing schools into high-performing learning communities takes place (i.e., procedural knowledge). This procedural knowledge will be used to create research-based strategies and innovative programs for improving school practice that are developed and tested in real-world settings. These strategies and programs are then replicated in other school sites, and once proven, disseminated more widely to help increase the number of high-performing learning communities, and thus the number of successful students.

As with all institutional change, transforming low-performing schools into high-performing learning communities is complex. Many school administrators and staffs see the need for change, many want to change, and many have tried to change. But they lack the know-how to make significant improvements. The staffs of low-performing schools and districts often do not know how to translate their beliefs and expectations into a coherent educational program; align curriculum with standards; collect, analyze, and interpret student data that would help them assess their current practice; or find strategies and programs to improve their practice. RELs have extensive research and development experience in all of these areas and bring the benefits of this experience to the challenge of school transformation.

Governing Boards Help Maintain Regional Focus

Each REL is guided by a board of directors that is representative of the region's population. The boards include representatives from state departments of education as well as school administrators, teachers, academicians, policymakers, parents, and business leaders. The REL boards advise and offer input regarding important concerns, issues, and challenges that each state faces. They also provide valuable regional contacts and ensure that each lab's research and development agenda is driven by regional needs.

The Regional Educational Laboratory program was established more than 30 years ago, and 10 RELs have been working at school sites in all 50 states plus the District of Columbia, the Pacific Island Territories, the Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico since 1985. The labs work on regional and national education issues, applying what they learn from their own and others' research and development projects to spur meaningful school change. They develop and adapt solutions to a variety of situations. Their expertise is critical to the transformation of low-performing schools into high-performing learning communities and to meeting the needs of students who are often left behind. Additionally, the regional focus of each laboratory provides REL staff members with an understanding of local and state contexts, challenges, and mandates that can be invaluable to schools seeking change.

RELs Respond to Regional Challenges

The stories and tables that follow present an overview of the challenges the RELs are facing during the 2001–2005 contract as well as their strategies for addressing these challenges. Across the country the labs are partnering with schools and districts to build capacity for school improvement and high student achievement by focusing on accessing and using data, identifying critical needs, creating and implementing strategies that improve teaching and learning, and strengthening administrator and teacher quality.

Because this is the first full year of a new contract, many of these stories describe early phases of research and development projects. Other stories draw on work begun in a previous contract period that laid a foundation for additional research and development to be carried out through the contract period.

AEL Takes Team Approach to Improve Teaching Quality

Twelve years after Michael Jordan got past Cleveland's Craig Ehlo to make the buzzer-beating shot that propelled the Chicago Bulls to the NBA playoffs, people still talk about

"the shot" and the player who made it. What made Jordan so successful? Did individual talent lead him and the Bulls to six NBA titles, or did organizational factors enable the success of team players? AEL is asking these questions, but in a different arena—education.

Understanding the System and the Individual

"There are parallels between education and team sports," says Dr. Jim Craig, who leads AEL's study on teaching quality. "Both organizational and individual considerations come into play. AEL wants to discover how to influence professional development and school structures so that teachers can deliver their personal best performances in the classroom."

At the school level, teaching-quality issues involve difficulties in recruitment and retention, the culture of low expectations for both teachers and students, and the absence of a learning community to support teacher and student change. At the individual level, problems include inadequate knowledge and skills and an intransigence to change and improvement. These barriers to high-quality teaching are embedded in the findings of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. Its 1997 report asserts that rigorous accountability standards do not appear to improve student outcomes unless investments are made in raising teaching quality.*

To address these barriers, AEL is examining the systems involved in training, recruiting, developing, and retaining teachers. Researchers are testing models that employ research and technology. Partners are establishing mechanisms for incorporating learnings into policy and practice. Success of AEL's efforts will contribute to the strength and number of the region's high-performing learning communities—places where all students can succeed.

Teaming with Institutions of Higher Education

A centerpiece of the Lab's work is the AEL Higher Education Co-Venture. This formal organization comprises 15 research institutions in Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. Co-Venture members work with AEL to identify research needs and other opportunities, and have agreed to use joint findings to shape teacher preparation programs.

"It's a challenge to pull people away from their university environments and put together their research efforts to come up with results greater than they could accomplish alone," says Dr. James McMillan, a Co-Venture partner at Virginia Commonwealth University. "AEL has been a great catalyst for making this happen." The Co-Venture is working with AEL on the following aspects of improving teaching quality.

Linking regional databases. AEL is facilitating the development of a system for sharing current, relevant, and accurate data regarding the teaching force (for example, certification area, years of service, and other variables related to supply and demand). "Databases about teachers and teaching quality are being created throughout the region," says Craig. "What is needed is a way to link these pre-existing efforts. Now, we're working with state technology

* Read *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future* at www.nctaf.org/publications/WhatMattersMost.pdf

officials and others to do that." Linked databases can help school districts recruit teachers whose certification and experience match local needs. They could also inform the decisions of policymakers and practitioners.

Researching how identification of individual strengths might improve teacher performance. There has been great emphasis in the corporate world on identifying employees' talents early and building them into areas of expertise. AEL is teaming with The Gallup Corporation to help prospective and practicing teachers identify and develop their strengths. AEL will document the results of using strengths-based feedback with pre-service and in-service teachers. Also being investigated: what happens when teachers provide students with feedback about how they can use their strengths to succeed academically.

Establishing and studying an alternative high school model. AEL is examining the effectiveness of New Collaborative Schools in promoting teaching quality specific to students who are capable of high-level work but, for one reason or another, have "disengaged" from learning in traditional high school settings. "This work has the potential of meeting the needs of students who may not otherwise finish school," says Lab director Dr. Doris Redfield. New Collaborative Schools offer at-risk youth a fresh start, small class sizes, counseling and academic support, and an opportunity to earn a high school diploma as they develop work readiness and prepare for higher education. Located on college, university, or community college campuses, they encourage students to "take ownership" of their education and their futures. Technology facilitates communication and capacity within and across sites. Findings related to student success are shared with teacher preparation programs.

Discovering ways to help teachers develop students' minds and talents is the ultimate goal of AEL's work. "Don't all parents want their child's teacher to perform at the top of their game?" says Craig. "Teachers want to deliver their personal best; students should have that opportunity as well. But improving the quality of teaching means influencing the individuals and systems that support it. Remember—even Michael, with his incredible talent and work ethic, didn't win an NBA title without the support of his teammates and coach."

AEL Regional Problems and Strategies

Problem: Lack of capacity of low-performing schools to transform themselves into high-performing learning communities.

Rationale: Effective models are needed to build school capacity in state and local contexts.
Strategies for Addressing Problem(s): Develop model for providing intensive assistance in sites identified by the region's Chief State School Officers. Assess and refine the model with experts on low-performing schools, researchers on school change in rural and minority communities, and experts on collaborative action research.

Problem: Barriers preventing some teachers from delivering their personal best.

Rationale: Individual and organizational factors must be examined and influenced to enable teachers to be highly effective.
Strategies for Addressing Problem(s): Facilitate interstate sharing of teacher quality data. Investigate how identification of individual strengths can become a teacher development tool. Examine a model that promotes teaching quality specific to disengaged students. Conduct collaborative research on teaching quality and infuse findings in teacher education programs.

Problem: Lack of vision and knowledge allowing schools and communities to work together.

Rationale: Schools often represent the highest local concentration of resources, but school and community members need help identifying mutual benefits of working together, developing effective partnerships, and harnessing resources.
Strategies for Addressing Problem(s): In sites identified by the region's Chief State School Officers: enhance community relations, document what is working in effective partnerships, and codify procedures. Explore strategies used in faith communities to foster development of the whole child.

Problem: Limited policymaker access to reliable, R&D-based, state-specific information.

Rationale: Conditions that support or hinder improvements in school and student performance are often found in the systems and structures of state policy.
Strategies for Addressing Problem(s): Increase policymaker access to and use of timely, focused information by convening role-alike groups, reporting state-specific data, and providing policy analysis and interpretation around specific issues.

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LAB

The Hard Facts: LAB Model and School Data Direct Change

It wasn't that the issues facing Mt. Pleasant High School in Providence, Rhode Island, were extraordinary or new: student achievement was low and drop-out rates were high. But when a school redesign team formed in the summer of 2000, the staff tried something a little different—data collection—and were surprised to learn things about their school that they had never expected.

Data Reveals Hidden Truths

"There were questions we hadn't asked before, like which students failed, and why?" says principal Nancy Mullen. "We had some assumptions about that, but they turned out to be incorrect." Staff took for granted that the failing students must be the ones who were chronically absent. The data showed that was true in only half the cases.

"The other half came to school every day," says Mullen. "So we've had to do some soul-searching as to why so many kids who are here every day still fail."

As one of six high schools targeted in Providence and Yonkers, New York, Mt. Pleasant receives direct assistance from the Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University (LAB) in collecting and analyzing its own data. Using a relational database program, they import facts and figures that are rarely brought together: data from student information systems, state assessment data files, and testing program data files, for example. The user-friendly data profiles, and the coaching that accompanies them, then allow district and school staff to easily see relationships across variables and relate information about student performance to particular student characteristics.

"Many teachers and principals don't know how poorly their students are doing until you place those numbers in front of them in ways they haven't seen before," explains Patti Smith, research and evaluation specialist at the LAB. "The data helps to stir up some thinking about how and why things are going the way they are in schools. It also gives people an anchor to rely on to monitor the change over time and the courage to admit when it's time to take a new route."

Extensive Support for Low-Performing Schools

The data collection is part of a broader LAB project that focuses on developing and researching a systemic, data-based process to support implementation of the Breaking Ranks framework. Developed by the National Association of Secondary School Principals in partnership with the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, *Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution* provides a series of recommendations for high schools. The recommendations include personalization in the learning process, a curriculum organized around essential learnings and connected to real world tasks, collaborative leadership, and community partnerships. During the last regional educational laboratory contract cycle, the LAB developed and tested components that support school implementation of the Breaking Ranks model. Having recognized the potential of Breaking Ranks as a vehicle for guiding reform in low-performing schools, the LAB is now working with schools to develop and study a systemic, data-based process that supports schools implementing the framework.

Procedural components of the model include a school self-assessment, a facilitation process to support school transformation, and assistance to the schools to utilize data as a vehicle for school improvement. As the project moves forward, the research will explore key issues that touch upon the challenges of achieving the vision of a high-performing learning community in high-poverty, urban settings.

Data Leads to Change in Mt. Pleasant

For Mullen, some trouble spots at Mt. Pleasant became apparent once she and her team looked at enrollment figures. There were generally about 600 ninth-graders, yet only 350 students made up the tenth-grade class. Somewhere early in their high school careers, a critical mass of students were staying back or leaving Mt. Pleasant altogether. This led to a close examination of grade nine data and the creation of a ninth-grade academy. Set to open in fall 2001, this academy will include small learning communities, increased personalization, and more attention devoted to literacy. Ninth-grade teachers will have expanded planning time for outreach and professional development.

Now that she knows what she's looking for and how to get it, Mullen will watch closely to see what happens with her school's youngest students. Mt. Pleasant has put in place a subcommittee of the school redesign team, charged specifically with examining data.

"We now have a vehicle to get the data, and in a format we can read," she says. "We had never asked the questions, and we were forced to examine ourselves. The LAB has proven invaluable as a resource for redesign."

LAB at Brown University Regional Problems and Strategies

Problem: Low academic achievement due to secondary-level students disengaged from learning.

Rationale: Predominant size, structure, and outdated programs of urban high schools contribute to failure to adapt institutional environments to the individual learning needs of adolescent students.
Strategies for Addressing Problem(s): Create and study ways to transform urban high schools through personalization of student learning. Address instructional strategies to promote adolescent literacy and programs for aligning academic rigor and real-world standards for students from diverse backgrounds.

Problem: Failure to improve teacher training, development, and nurturing.

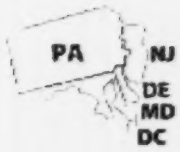
Rationale: The standards movement and the growing cultural/linguistic diversity of the student population present new challenges to classroom instructors.
Strategies for Addressing Problem(s): Promote inquiry-based teacher learning with improved student achievement as its goal through collaborative, long-term, schoolwide planning. Explore content and instructional needs, policy, processes, and interventions that support high-performing learning communities.

Problem: Insufficient capacity of educational leaders to transform low-performing schools. Declining supply of educational leaders.

Rationale: Heightened attention to standards and accountability increases pressures on already overextended, underprepared, inadequately supported administrators.
Strategies for Addressing Problem(s): Collaborate with states, intermediaries, districts, and schools to develop leadership strategies, practices, and knowledge base to empower leaders at all levels to transform low-performing schools and improve student learning.

LSS

LSS Helps Students Explore Communities Near and Far



At the Laboratory for Student Success (LSS), collaboration among school, family, and the community is at the very core of turning low-performing schools into high-performing learning communities. Collaboration is multifaceted: it is about recognizing opportunities, finding ways to work together, maximizing potential, and connecting learning across domains, distance, and differences. Building bridges between communities and schools expands opportunities for educational equity and success. LSS recognizes that technology offers a realm of possibilities for students and schools to form collaborative links in unique, exciting, and productive ways.

LSS provides rich collaborative and technological support for a wide range of schools in the mid-Atlantic region. Two recent projects at LSS schools are compelling examples of how its Advanced Technology for Learning Laboratory (ATL) uses communication and collaboration as a bridge to expand educational opportunities.

Integrating Technology and Community

At the Jay Cooke Middle School in urban Philadelphia, LSS established a team to support sound collaborative strategies for technology integration. Barry Mansfield, LSS implementation specialist, states, "We need to create internal capacity so that when we leave a site, the staff are empowered to continue on their own." To that end, LSS provided staff support in three critical areas: establishing a realistic and effective system of professional development, finding authentic uses of technology to support service-learning projects, and using technology as a communication and collaboration device among teachers. In addition, with the strong leadership of principal JoAnn Caplan, LSS produced a video highlighting those three areas and how this work has impacted the Jay Cooke School's ability to support collaborative activities with the community.

As part of a school-community project, Jay Cooke Middle School teacher Joan Pasternak's students began by asking the simple, driving question, "Do our voices count?" As part of a unit on the African American experience, they explored different channels of civic participation. Students inventoried the surrounding neighborhood using a database and technology know-how to record the location of vacant houses, lots, and other signs of urban blight. Throughout the year, they used digital media to document the process and shared their observations at town meetings and with politicians visiting their classroom.

During the class project, a city-wide effort to clean up abandoned cars and houses was launched. "In the end," remarked Pasternak, "the students believed that their voices were in fact heard."

In such projects, LSS's Advanced Technology for Learning Lab lives up to its name. ATL offered technology as a new tool for bridging the domains of classroom and community. The lessons of communication and collaboration were made real to all involved: students, school, and community.

Using Technology to Broaden Cultural Perspectives

When studying Native American culture at Russell Conwell Middle School in Philadelphia, sixth-grader Victoria Scriben decided she wanted her report to be more than the typical class project. Her class had been communicating as pen pals with a

sixth-grade class at Wakpala Elementary School on a Lakota reservation in South Dakota. Teachers at both schools had started the project as part of a program to improve writing skills. Victoria thought the pals should meet face-to-face. She turned to her aunt, Samira Woods, and set the stage for a high-tech, cross-cultural program. Woods, an implementation specialist at LSS, provides support for Wakpala Elementary School's comprehensive school reform program.

In a video link from South Dakota to Victoria's school in Philadelphia, students participated in a 45-minute video conference in which they introduced themselves, shared the history of their names, showed favorite personal items, and asked their pen pals—now e-pals—questions. Their shared interest and curiosity about each other's culture was evident. Nothing illustrated this better than the final moments of the conference when, in exchange for seeing the latest hip hop dance steps, a Wakpala student dressed in full Lakota regalia showed the young audience the significance of his attire and performed a Native American dance.

This cross-country video link provided a rich connection for the students of Wakpala and Philadelphia, who are excited about the next scheduled conference. Several Wakpala students and their teacher will visit Philadelphia to continue this cultural and technological

exchange. Through their participation in the e-pal experience, both groups of students can now see beyond cultural differences. With such vision come understanding, knowledge, and student success.

LSS will expand its collaborative projects with the staff and students of both the Jay Cooke Middle School and the Wakpala School. "These schools are showing the beginning trends of school improvement," says JoAnn Manning, executive director of LSS, "and they hold the promise of educational success that working together in collaborative ways can make happen."

By bringing together the curiosity of students, the cooperation of communities, and the benefits of technology, the Laboratory for Student Success is helping transform low-performing schools into high-performing learning communities. Along the way, procedural knowledge is collected and resources refined, ready to share with other schools that LSS will help travel the path to educational success.

LSS Regional Problems and Strategies

Problem: Unsuccessful implementation of improvement initiatives due to insufficient teacher quality and supply.

Rationale: The region faces teacher shortages, increasing student numbers, the need to reduce class size, and increasing numbers of "at-risk" students.
Strategies for Addressing Problem(s): Re-engineer schools and colleges of education to improve learning for children and pre-service teachers. Develop a regional database comparing/contrasting states with regard to licensing, recruitment, and certification practices. Formulate policies that support an intensive, common approach to these issues.

Problem: Insufficient emphasis on building and sustaining comprehensive school improvement efforts.

Rationale: Lack of documentation on improvement efforts and inadequate procedural knowledge lead to minimal support for teachers and administrators.
Strategies for Addressing Problem(s): Research individual and institutional resilience. Collaborate with strategic partners to provide information and technical assistance for informed decision-making and meeting reform needs. Network to build capacity for student success in meeting state and local standards and to utilize procedural knowledge to scale up school reform efforts.

Problem: Insufficient linking of schools, parents, and community agencies.

Rationale: Problems of many children and families transcend a school's capacity to serve them effectively. Schools can succeed only to the extent that community efforts in health, economics, and safety also succeed.
Strategies for Addressing Problem(s): Increase the knowledge base on the process of bridging in communities, schools, universities, and elsewhere. Develop and implement processes to maximize resulting connections.

Problem: Insufficient integration of technology with education system.

Rationale: Technologies can support, enhance, and transform teaching, learning, and educational leadership, but strategies and procedural knowledge are not universally available.
Strategies for Addressing Problem(s): Foster integration of technology into K–12 teaching and learning. Support those selecting, using, maintaining, and evaluating educational technologies. Provide professional development activities for teachers, technology coordinators, administrators, and other educators. Create and sustain networks and repositories of shared expertise and material resources.

Change Begins at the Top with Help from McREL

Recently, Nebraska Commissioner of Education Dr. Doug Christensen asked his department to reduce the stacks of forms it required districts to turn in to the state education agency. When no reductions resulted, a staff member posted the forms on a wall in the office.

The many forms required of local agencies papered nearly 30 feet of wall, soon dubbed the "wall of shame."

"It got everybody's attention," says Christensen. "Immediately we saw teams taking action to reduce unwarranted reporting burdens. As a result, we eliminated more than 277 pages of forms that we required schools to complete."

The wall of shame showed vividly how the department's lack of coordination was hindering, rather than supporting, school improvement efforts—a problem not unique to Nebraska.

A Partnership toBuild Leadership Capacity

Traditionally, state education agencies have played a largely regulatory role in state education systems. They have monitored district compliance with regulations and channeled grants to local schools. In this era of "new accountability," however, accreditation is tied more to school or student performance than to compliance with regulations. States realize that rather than simply monitor and regulate, they need to help schools and districts raise student achievement.

To help address the lack of leadership capacity to build high-performing learning systems, Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) has formed a partnership with Nebraska. While helping Nebraska develop more distributed and facilitative leadership, McREL also is documenting and capturing procedural knowledge that it will use to help develop the leadership capacity of other state education agencies. For its part, McREL engaged Myron Kellner-Rogers, a nationally known expert in organizational change, to assist the department in transforming itself into a service-oriented institution.

Hardly an entrenched bureaucracy, Nebraska has a high degree of readiness, points out Brian McNulty, project manager and vice president of field services at McREL. "It's a very progressive organization. They are ready to change—and have been undertaking this process on their own for a few years now. We are helping them take it to the next level."

Reaching that next level required joining the knowledge and expertise of McREL staff with the energy, focus, and readiness of Christensen and his staff.

To end stifled communications and build new team relationships, Christensen distributed leadership in the department by creating the Leadership Council—a team of 12 "movers and shakers"—designed to take the department in a new direction. "The Leadership Council was a name change, a structural change, and a public way of announcing that

we were going to begin doing business differently," Christensen says. The Leadership Council works directly with Christensen and the deputy commissioner. They work as equals, functioning as the leadership team for the department.

While working with McREL, the council identified a focus of its work—finding ways to support low-performing schools. Members of the council realized that it was only a matter of time before state lawmakers mandated how the department should support low-performing schools. Rather than wait to react, the team acted to develop new ways to better serve low-performing schools.

From Fragmentation to Community

One of the first issues the council confronted was that data harvested from schools were stored in separate "silos," rather than shared across the organization. As a result, different parts of the department were asking for the same information—as illustrated by the wall of shame.

Kellner-Rogers notes that such fragmentation and specialization is typical among highly technical organizations—such as state education agencies—because people need to organize around expertise that serves constituents' needs. Yet the more narrowly focused they become, the more barriers they develop. As a result, they tend to duplicate efforts and squander intellectual and financial resources.

The solution is not to demand that everyone become a generalist. Rather it's to focus on the bigger picture, the compelling intent of the work that draws people together. This shift demands new ways of working together, which in turn lead to conflict, ambiguity, and loss of control. "This is where the process often breaks down," says Kellner-Rogers. "People tend to return to their known identities when there is ambiguity. It requires leadership commitment to hold people in this ambiguity long enough for them to discover new competence."

Already, the council's efforts appear to be paying off. In a recent survey, constituents noted that the department has made significant efforts to reduce the paperwork burden and improve its responsiveness.

"Doug Christensen and his staff are taking on a daunting but critically important challenge—to make a fundamental shift in organizational identity and mission," notes Tim Waters, McREL's executive director. "They've made a commitment to reforming themselves in ways similar to what is being asked of schools. Their effort requires both vision and courage that we feel honored to support."

McREL will continue to support the Leadership Council in its next endeavor—developing a system to identify low-performing schools that avoids unfairly branding those that are doing the best they can under challenging circumstances. Says Christensen, "We want our language to reflect that all schools can improve, all schools can get better, and that we intend to leave no child behind."

McREL Regional Problems and Strategies

Problem: Lack of capacity to use standards to reform classroom practice.

Rationale: Teachers are overwhelmed by the number of standards and need effective classroom practices for diverse learners. States and districts need procedural knowledge to develop technologically sound assessment and accountability systems.
Strategies for Addressing Problem(s): Develop online curriculum and instructional units to teach multiple standards. Research effective standards-based classrooms in "beat-the-odds" schools. Design guidelines for accountability systems that balance local and state responsibility. Conduct research and provide technical assistance to increase learning opportunities for diverse learners. Provide assistance to local education agencies in designing accountability and assessment systems.

Problem: Declining availability of quality teachers.

Rationale: Teachers need new skills to teach in standards-based classrooms, but lack effective staff development. Teacher quality is also hampered by current preparation, certification, and licensure systems and the lack of differentiated roles for teachers.
Strategies for Addressing Problem(s): Identify necessary elements to prepare teachers to be effective in standards-based classrooms. Analyze incentives states use to encourage effective professional development programs. Study the impact of state policies on teacher quality and availability. Build capacity of intermediate service agencies to provide training related to standards. Research and pilot-test an exemplary teacher compensation system.

Problem: Lack of leadership capacity to build high-performing learning systems.

Rationale: School and district leaders lack capacity to support improvement efforts; state education agencies need strategies to move from a compliance model to a support model. Rural leaders need strategies and resources to address unique issues.
Strategies for Addressing Problem(s): Host academies and provide training sessions for leaders of high-needs schools. Create networks of urban leaders, rural educators, and chief state school officers to share best practices. Examine relationships between leadership capacity and student achievement. Help states build capacity to better serve low-performing schools, and create online resources to address needs of rural schools.

Problem: Failure to adequately support systemic school reform.

Rationale: States, districts, and schools need procedural knowledge as well as appropriate guidance and resources to transform low-performing schools into high-performing learning communities.
Strategies for Addressing Problem(s): Help state education agencies address policy and program fragmentation. Help schools that have adopted comprehensive school reform models sustain these programs. Form consortia of low-performing schools to work together toward high performance. Develop and field-test a process for integrating technology into school curricula, thus fostering systemic reform.

NCREL Helps Unlock the Power of Data—Schools Already Hold the Key

Like many educators in the north central region, staff members at a small, rural school in northern Wisconsin knew they could learn from the pages and pages of data their school collected—test scores, grades, demographics, budgets, curriculum information and more—but they didn't quite know how.

"As educators, we believe we're doing good things for kids," said Paul Bierman, Florence County Elementary School's principal. "But it's good to look at concrete data—the real evidence that shows how you're doing as a school and as a district."

Finding the Right Tools for the Job

Educators in Florence County are not alone in their quest to use data to improve student achievement. The North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL) has found, through local and national research, feedback from partners, and voices from the field, that states, districts, and schools throughout the region and the nation are searching for better methods to report and to understand the many uses of data.

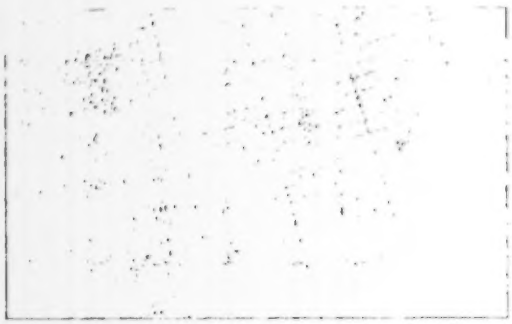
In response to this need for solid data and the ability to use them, NCREL has developed a core set of tools, publications, and services to support education decision making. Many of these resources can be accessed online at NCREL's ToolBelt Web site (www.ncrel.org/toolbelt). The site demonstrates how educators can collect data about their classrooms, schools, or districts through the use of information-gathering tools including checklists, surveys, and software. The ToolBelt also includes links to two NCREL-developed, state-specific, data-rich Web sites, Wisconsin's Information Network for Successful Schools and the Illinois School Improvement Web site.

At Florence Elementary, Bierman knows it is important for administrators and teachers to not only look at student data, but to interpret and use the data effectively. In January 2000, a school team from Florence attended a data retreat designed to give them an opportunity to learn better methods for collecting and analyzing data, including the results from their state's assessment exam.

Putting Data to Work

After the retreat, Bierman and his colleagues were able to share what they learned with staff, discuss problem areas, and generate concrete action steps to focus directly on those areas that needed improvement. "Looking at data can help identify gaps in the curriculum," Bierman said. "It helps to find your strengths and weaknesses and areas where you can improve." NCREL is scaling up data retreats like these to provide similar opportunities for school teams across the region.

One of the weaknesses Bierman and his team uncovered was within their math curriculum. NCREL's Curriculum Mapping Web site lets



schools input their local mathematics and science curricula data online. The site then displays a visual that compares their data side-by-side with that of the top-performing schools from the Third International Mathematics and Science Study. Gaps in student performance and learning needs can be identified by analyzing assessment data. The Curriculum Mapping site helps schools like Florence Elementary design new curricula to address those needs.

In addition to curriculum, instruction and assessment, NCREL's data-related products and services can stimulate change in other areas. For example, Florence Elementary staff gained insights from data indicating that they had not been allocating their funding as efficiently as they could have been. "We looked at the numbers and learned how to use our resources better," Bierman said. "We are now purchasing materials in a more efficient manner than we used to."

Florence Elementary teachers and administrators, like the majority of schools in the north central region, have access to critical data. What most schools do not have is the experience and capacity to use the data, to interpret the information, and to make the right changes. For example, through frequent use of data, teachers can implement changes in their instructional practices that benefit students right away rather than waiting to make changes the next school year.

NCREL is committed to developing research-based resources such as Web sites, publications, and workshops that demonstrate how to effectively use data to inform education decision making. NCREL's resources and services make data accessible and more understandable for educators, thereby helping them to alter instruction and improve student achievement. NCREL's systematic approach to data provides the right support at every level—state, district, and school—with the ultimate outcome being success for every student.

NCREL Regional Problems and Strategies

Problem: Lack of procedural knowledge to integrate technology into teaching and learning.

Rationale: Technology professional development opportunities are insufficient; and technology policy and governance structures are inadequate or misaligned. Systemic integration into school practice and reform is lacking; access to educational technology resources is inequitable.

Strategies for Addressing Problem(s): Provide school leaders with better access to procedural knowledge to apply technology to learning. Develop and disseminate publications and Web-based tools. Work with policymakers and administrators to align governance and administration around technology integration.

Problem: Poor student literacy skills, especially in high poverty and minority groups. Inadequate teacher preparation.

Rationale: Teachers have limited access to tools and resources that support knowledge and skill development. National, regional, and state literacy initiatives have been ineffectively coordinated to leverage resources, share research and best practice data, support the development of tools and services for teachers, or inform policy and practice.

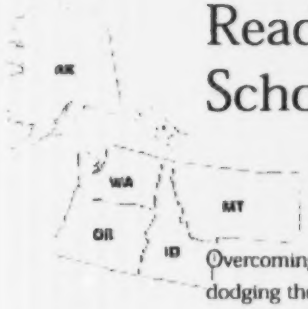
Strategies for Addressing Problem(s): Provide teachers and administrators with pre-service and in-service professional development opportunities on how students learn to read and develop literacy skills. Build capacity of teachers to choose and use resources appropriately. Provide mechanisms to measure student progress. Synthesize and disseminate literacy education research and best practice.

Problem: Adoption and implementation of school improvement and reform efforts without sound research or data.

Rationale: Educators lack access to and the capacity to use high-quality, well-organized data to inform their decisions.

Strategies for Addressing Problem(s): Develop repositories of data, provide analyses of trends, and convene stakeholders to discuss data-driven solutions. Investigate the impact of current preservice training and professional development on the capacity for data use. Work with policymakers and educators to provide accessible data and the capacity for analysis.

Reading is Thinking: NWREL Helps Schools Overcome Literacy Challenges



Overcoming dramatic challenges—dodging the Pacific's deadly sneaker waves and conquering intimidating mountain ranges—is a Northwest way of life. Knowledge, ready skills, and the right tools at the right time make the difference between deadly failure and exhilarating success. When teaching diverse children to be competent readers and thinkers, a range of tools, knowledge, and skills helps, but choosing the right tool is crucial.

Like the rest of the country, the Northwest is experiencing increasing cultural and language diversity. Its poverty rates for racially diverse students are higher than for whites. Poverty tends to foreclose on opportunities for literary resources in the home, yet young children must develop phonics knowledge and need rich literary experiences, essential for learning to read and write in the early school years. Reading is more than saying words; it is both language and thinking. From kindergarten through high school, students need ample opportunities to engage in activities that enhance language and thinking.

Tools for Advancing Literacy

For schools to overcome literacy challenges, teachers must be knowledgeable about best practices in literacy instruction and skilled in teaching and motivating children from economically disadvantaged families and from linguistically and culturally diverse families. The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) has been helping schools throughout the Northwest to meet these challenges with research-based tools and knowledge. For example, knowledge from literacy and language research has been captured for use by teachers in products that include *Building a Knowledge Base in Reading*, a 1997 NWREL research synthesis co-published by the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association; the Laboratory's subsequent publication *Using the Knowledge Base in Reading*; and its *Learning to Read and Write: A Place to Start*. These and numerous other tools help inform and lay the reform groundwork to advance achievement levels in reading. NWREL and the region's schools must also be prepared to meet the challenges of improvement within environments that are complex.

Complex Environments Within a Diverse Region

Two partner schools working with Northwest Laboratory to achieve their goal of helping students to become competent readers and thinkers illustrate the very different contexts in which knowledge about effective literacy procedures will be applied.

Siletz Elementary School, in a small rural community on the Oregon coast, has approximately 229 students in grades K–8. In poverty indicators, about 68 percent of the students are on free or reduced lunch. About 40 percent of the school's students are Native American. Student diversity and ethnic pride are school assets, but contribute to the complexity of successful teaching and learning. State assessment data underscore a pressing need to increase student achievement in reading.

For 18 months the Laboratory worked with Siletz staff using a curriculum inquiry approach that resulted in a school focus on literacy as well as recognition of the difficulty in making the leap from research to classroom practice. With Laboratory assistance, the school developed a Title I schoolwide

improvement plan, secured Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration project funding, reviewed CSRD school-reform models, and selected the Success for All schoolwide reading program. Siletz will implement the program in September 2001. Northwest Laboratory will continue to support their efforts with action research by teachers, an approach for teachers to systematically reflect on their work and make changes in practice to improve student learning.

By contrast, North Star Elementary, a new Laboratory partner, is located in urban Anchorage, Alaska. The school serves two homeless shelters; approximately 20 percent of North Star students are from homeless families. There are 22 language/cultural groups represented in the North Star student body and about 65 percent of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. Student mobility is a challenge, yet California Achievement Test 5 (CAT 5) scores show growth when students stay a full school year before the test.

North Star teachers have implemented a plethora of strategies to meet complex student needs, resulting in long, grueling days. Even so, teachers retain their earnest desire to find ways to help their students. In helping North Star to craft its second Title I schoolwide plan, the Laboratory will provide research-based assistance so staff can devise efficient ways to work collaboratively, focusing on priority needs and using data to match tools with needs.

Developing Resources for the Future

In addition to helping schools with existing resources, the Laboratory will be developing targeted new ones as it works with 15 partner schools conducting applied research and development. For example, technology plays an effective role to encourage language and literacy development when used to support learning needs. A resource guide to be developed will focus on recent research in literacy, technology, and effective practice.

Access to tools is crucial—choosing and using them effectively even more so. As with any tool, practice builds the skill. Northwest Laboratory will conduct real-work workshops to offer that practice. Participants will practice research-based comprehension strategies used by proficient readers, and learn how to put them into practice in their own classrooms.

Over the years, skilled Northwesterners have passed on their knowledge to others so that they can safely scale mountains and enjoy the Pacific. In this tradition, Northwest Lab is helping its partner schools to apply effective procedures and appropriate resources to ensure that all children acquire reading skills that enable them to thrive in today's world.

NWREL Regional Problems and Strategies

Problem: Schools face the problem of re-engineering themselves to plan, implement, and sustain the capacity to become high-performing learning communities.

Rationale: Re-engineering calls for schools, districts, and their communities to use quality management principles to implement the structures, processes, programs, and training necessary to renew themselves. Renewal is based on a shared vision, changing context, student population, proven successful practices, and community expectations and requirements.

Problem: Schools face the problem of how to more effectively plan, implement, and sustain quality teaching and learning that contributes to high-performing learning communities.

Rationale: Quality classroom instruction is key to student achievement. Professional development should focus on the roles of the learner and teacher and on how learning takes place.

Problem: Schools face the problem of more adequately assessing students' progress in achieving high performance standards.

Rationale: Well-aligned, authentic, and continuous feedback is needed to inform teachers, students, and parents of their progress in meeting state standards. Assessments guide teachers in day-to-day work and decision-making.

Problem: Schools face the problem of how to achieve high levels of literacy and language development among all of their students.

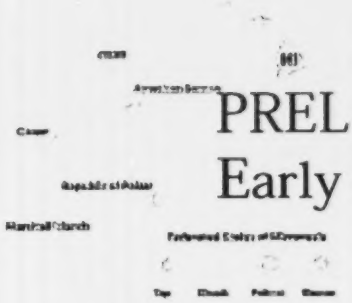
Rationale: Educators need access to research-based practices in language development and literacy; they must choose appropriately from many resources and programs.

Problem: Schools face the problem of how to develop and sustain meaningful school, family, and community partnerships.

Rationale: Schools must work with families and communities in new and different ways if every student is to achieve challenging standards. Communities must work with schools to create and extend learning opportunities in safe and engaging environments.

Strategies for Addressing Problem(s): NWREL is using three interrelated strategies to help schools overcome these five problems in an integrated approach:

1. Regional Awareness and Outreach Activities engage educators in an ongoing way in delineating problems, discussing their resolution, and disseminating resource information.
2. In-depth, long-term R&D Services are delivered to 15 high-poverty, low-performing schools that are the primary partner sites in developing and evaluating effective R&D products and processes.
3. R&D services are made available to educators to apply existing procedural knowledge, tools, and processes. Professional development institutes are conducted to disseminate procedural knowledge and tools.



PREL Focuses on Improved Early Reading Achievement

The vast and diverse region served by the Regional Educational Laboratory at Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL) spreads across 4.9 million square miles of ocean, islands, and atolls. The region includes 10 U.S.-affiliated entities whose political status ranges from statehood to free association. Pacific schools are characterized by a multiplicity of cultures, languages, and economic realities, and this diversity has a profound impact on teaching and learning.

A Diverse and Complex Region

In the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), the Marshall Islands, and Palau, English is not the language of the home or community for most students. In the past, educators have placed great emphasis on learning English, but paid very little attention to developing literacy skills in local languages. And although extended families and the wider community have shared rich oral histories for many generations, the more recent phenomenon of reading and writing in local languages is still in the developing stages. Books, magazines, and other reading materials in Pacific languages are scarce. Standards for first-language literacy are being developed and orthographies continue to be revised, updated, and disputed. Many teachers in the region are local high school graduates who go directly into teaching. They attend community college classes part-time until they earn their Associate of Arts degrees, often in fields other than education. Technology resources in these communities are limited, and in some outer-island schools a generator is the only source of electricity.

In contrast, many schools in American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, and Hawaii have computers and Internet connections in the classroom or in well-equipped

school technology centers. An abundance of books, newspapers, magazines, and other English-language reading materials are readily available electronically and in hard copy. Most, if not all, teachers have at least a bachelor of arts degree from a four-year college or university.

Common Problems Emerge—and Common Needs

But whether the setting is Pacific-language dominant, bilingual, or English dominant, Pacific communities are alike in prioritizing the need for improved literacy, particularly in early reading. Significant numbers of Pacific students are not reading independently in English or in their home languages by the end of third grade. As a result, too many students are unable to use literacy skills for further learning. Students who speak a Pacific language but have not learned to read in that language are unable to transfer reading skills to English, the language of higher

educational opportunities. One high school administrator in the FSM commented that "even the students who pass the high school entrance exam are not reading at grade level. This makes it even harder for them to reach high levels of understanding in the subjects taught in high school."

Pacific schools also have difficulty improving student learning in part because they have not designed or aligned assessment systems and accountability processes with instruction and content standards. There is a great need to create systems that connect large-scale and classroom assessments.

PREL Partnerships Lead the Way

It is within these diverse contexts that PREL is embarking on a journey with local schools to make a difference in early reading achievement. In close collaboration with Pacific departments and ministries of education, PREL has identified 13 Co-Development Partner (CDP) Schools as intensive research and development sites. And the schools are ready to move. After an initial school meeting, the teachers and principal at Awak Elementary School in Pohnpei unanimously agreed to meet with a planning team from PREL to begin school improvement planning for a week during their summer vacation.

Working collaboratively with schools on an ongoing and sustained basis, PREL will guide and support site-based solutions to early reading and assessment issues using a combination of current research, national resources, local knowledge and expertise, and innovative professional development. Support to each school includes developing a site-based school improvement plan focused on early reading, providing intensive professional development and in-class teacher guidance and support, and developing first-language and/or English-language reading materials and assessments.

In subsequent years, PREL also will work with approximately 25 Collaborative Partner Schools. These schools will have access to the learnings from the work in the CDP Schools as well as the diverse professional development opportunities offered through the partnership with PREL.

Ron Toma, director of the Regional Educational Laboratory at PREL, enthusiastically remarked, "When we see student achievement in reading increase at our CDP Schools, we'll take what we've learned and share it with as many other schools in the region as we can. We'll promote high-performing learning communities across the Pacific."

PREL Regional Problems and Strategies

Problem: Literacy skills insufficient to allow student learning.

Rationale: Many teachers lack access to/knowledge of early reading research and strategies. They lack support/guidance to implement newly learned strategies or techniques.

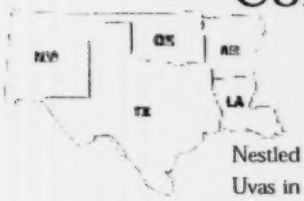
Strategies for Addressing Problem(s): Work collaboratively with schools on an ongoing basis. Support site-based solutions to early reading issues. Develop site-based school improvement plan. Provide in-class teacher support. Develop first language and/or English-language reading materials and assessments.

Problem: Lack of adequate/appropriate assessment systems and accountability processes.

Rationale: School systems have not designed assessment systems/accountability processes to measure the impact of instruction on content standards.

Strategies for Addressing Problem(s): Work collaboratively with schools on an ongoing basis. Support site-based solutions to assessment issues using research, national resources, local knowledge and expertise, and innovative professional development.

SEDL's Systemic Approach Creates Coherence and Builds Capacity in Schools



Nestled against the Sierras de las Uvas in southern New Mexico, the Hatch Valley is steeped in a tradition of family-owned farming and ranching. Hatch is a quiet community surrounded by chile fields and pecan orchards dependent on the Rio Grande for irrigation. Many area families rely upon migrant farm work, although they reside most of

the year in the valley. Students from migrant families are likely to miss the beginning and end of the school year and return late to school after the Christmas break. This attendance pattern, coupled with a high percentage of students (75 percent) with limited English proficiency, creates instructional challenges that the district must address in order to raise achievement.

The District Gathers Its Forces

Like the other 449 schools labeled as low performing in the southwest region, Hatch Valley public schools have low standardized test scores and limited capacity—skills, knowledge, and resources—to make significant, lasting improvements in student achievement by themselves. Unlike many of these schools, however, the Hatch schools have spent the past two years creating a climate so instruction can flourish. Superintendent Billy Henson has overseen the upgrading of facilities, which have been described as the jewels of the community. The school buildings, however, are not the district's only assets.

"Our biggest asset," says Georgia Lane, director of instruction and technology, "is our staff. Everyone wants to figure out how to better serve our students—from the central office staff to the principals, teachers, and custodians." Not only is the staff on board, but the students themselves are as well. Lane reports that the secondary students see the need to achieve at higher levels. "This year we've pushed hard and opened their eyes to the need to do better," she says. "They want to send out a different message than we're sending out now through our test scores."

SEDL's Systemic Approach Strengthens School Cultures

Hatch Valley is one of about 20 districts the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) is beginning to work with in a systemic way to help transform low-performing schools into high-performing learning communities by building the capacity of the schools and districts to improve teaching and learning over the long run.

Most of the schools and districts with which SEDL is working have adopted multiple improvement programs. Joan Buttram, SEDL executive vice-president and chief operating officer, explains, "Many of these schools find a problem, then find a program to address that problem. They find another problem and another program to address that problem. But then they face the task of how to fit all of the programs together to build coherence for teachers and students. We want schools to move away from that piecemeal, revolving door approach to improvement to a concerted effort to ensure long-term student success."

Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) Median Percentiles		
	READING	MATH
New Mexico – 4th Grade	46.0	47.2
Hatch – 4th Grade	26.8	28.0
New Mexico – 8th Grade	51.7	46.2
Hatch – 8th Grade	23.8	34.2

SEDL's partnership with the schools and districts includes providing long-term technical assistance in assessing school and district needs, facilitating structured dialogue to focus improvement efforts, and implementing strategies to strengthen existing reading and mathematics instructional programs.

Because the systemic approach requires all parts of the educational system (standards, curriculum and instruction, assessment, policy and governance, professional staff, resources, and family and community) to be linked, it helps build strong school cultures that foster professional and student growth. It encourages and supports innovation and constant improvement. SEDL's approach also requires that five competencies be mastered:

- collecting, interpreting, and using data,
- creating coherence,
- forging alliances,
- building capacity, and
- promoting innovation.

Initial Partnerships Lead to Strategies for All

Through its systemic work with the schools, SEDL will develop procedural knowledge in transforming low-performing schools into high-performing learning communities. The lab will promote and refine this knowledge through the development of tools and resources for teachers and administrators to use in their improvement efforts.

SEDL program manager David Rainey, who is leading this intensive site work, describes SEDL's initial work with Hatch and other partner districts: "SEDL is helping the staff take a close, critical look at student and other data. We're facilitating the analysis of data to get to the root causes of the schools' problems. We are also helping them devise strategies to handle these problems."

Rainey and his team members stress that SEDL's role is not to provide answers but to help provide school staff with the resources and skills and the pressure and support they need to work through the improvement process. And that is just the sort of help Lane realized her staff needed. "We're really excited. Our teachers have just worked so hard at improvement, but we've gone as far as we can go by ourselves. We hope that SEDL can get us there a little faster. You can make the leaps required for school improvement if you know how to do it."

SEDL Regional Problems and Strategies

Problem: Inability of low-performing schools to make significant, lasting improvements.

Rationale: Staffs of low-performing schools and districts have a limited capacity to translate their beliefs and expectations into a coherent educational program and often do not know what is needed to align curriculum and standards.

Strategies for Addressing Problem(s): Help school and district staffs examine data, develop improvement strategies and structures that create a culture for improvement and innovation, and strengthen existing reading and math programs. Create and promote procedural knowledge for practitioners to direct the transformation process. Identify, develop, and disseminate tools to support the transformation of low-performing sites into high-performing learning communities.

Problem: Limited capacity/resources of states' technical assistance infrastructures to respond to low-performing schools and districts.

Rationale: State education agencies acknowledge they lack enough resources to provide high-quality assistance to the low-performing schools and districts in need.

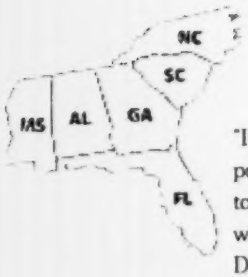
Strategies for Addressing Problem(s): Build the capacity of the technical assistance infrastructure to support the transformation of low-performing schools and districts. Create and promote procedural knowledge that technical assistance providers can help practitioners apply to guide the transformation process. Identify, develop, and disseminate tools to support the transformation of low-performing sites into high-performing learning communities.

Problem: Limited research-based information on how low-performing schools and districts transform themselves into high-performing learning communities and on how policymakers can help.

Rationale: The existing research and development knowledge base is rich with advice on how to work on isolated or limited improvement problems, but lacking in guidance on how to work more systemically at all levels — school, district, and state.

Strategies for Addressing Problem(s): Conduct regional studies on critical policy issues. Create and promote procedural knowledge for policymakers to support the transformation process.

SERVE's Policy Program Informs School Reform Process



"I make better judgments about policy and better recommendations to state policymakers when I know what other states are doing," says Diane Monrad, director of South Carolina's Educational Policy Center.

To help make those better decisions, Monrad turns to SERVE, the Regional Education Laboratory for the Southeast. SERVE has developed the infrastructure to address the diverse research and information needs of policymakers in the six southeastern states. The task of improving schools in order to increase the achievement of all students often begins with legislation and policies that are developed in each state legislature, state board of education, and state department of education. In recent years, as policymakers in the Southeast initiate school reform efforts through legislation and policy development, SERVE has studied how the Regional Laboratory can provide education policy research to inform the process.

Over the last 10 years, SERVE has collected procedural knowledge around the most effective ways to deliver policy research to policymakers. SERVE learned that the need for information varies with the issue and the amount of time available to understand the information. For example, policymakers may require a timely, concise report during a legislative session, but prefer an in-depth study at another time. The result of SERVE's work is a multi-faceted program — including the lab's senior policy research analysts, Policy Briefs series, Policy Network, Policy Institute, and Web sites that post policy research articles and briefs — aimed at the diverse needs of the policy audience in the Southeast.

SERVE works closely with state and regional policymakers to provide timely, cogent, research-based information and to assist them as they consider legislation, regulations, policies, and procedures that establish and support lasting school improvement and reform.

Linda Schrenko, superintendent of Georgia Public Schools, acknowledges the value she receives from the SERVE Education Policy program: "We use one federal (program), and that is our Southeastern Regional Lab. We are able to call and tell them that we want research information on any area."

State-Based Policy Analysts Provide Timely Information

SERVE understands that to influence policy and management decisions, research information must target the right audience at the right time and must be presented in the most useful form. To provide appropriate research-based information directly to each state, SERVE assigns a senior policy analyst to the office of the chief state school officer in the six states.

Mississippi Education Superintendent Richard Thompson says, "The SERVE policy analyst has assisted the Mississippi Department of Education with valuable research, which has enabled us to make more informed decisions regarding the implementation of policy."

South Carolina's Monrad adds, "It is important for the state department and other policymakers to have access to information from national and regional research initiatives. The SERVE policy analyst does this for us."

SERVE policy analysts develop working relationships with a wide range of policymakers and gain significant knowledge of the education legislation and policies in their respective states. For example, in Georgia and Mississippi, policy analysts are credited with researching and drafting legislation establishing charter schools.

Michael Ward, superintendent of schools for North Carolina, endorses this program: "SERVE provides a senior policy analyst based right in my office who is particularly helpful in the business of rapid-response research, pulling together information from a number of research pieces. It is that ability to synthesize quickly the existing research across a number of cases that gives you some sense of a trend in data."

Policy Publications Analyze and Report Issues and Trends

SERVE policy analysts conceptualize, research, and write Policy Briefs on issues of great importance to regional policymakers, business leaders, educators, and citizens. These publications analyze state, regional, and national education policy issues; identify and report trends; report the implications of policy decisions; examine specific policy choices among states in the region; and propose policies to enhance education.

Policy Network and Institute Facilitate Discussion of National Issues

The SERVE Education Policy program also reaches a wide range of southeastern policymakers through a regional Policy Network. This network consists of persons serving as education staff to governors, state superintendents of education, state boards of education, and legislative committees, as well as those serving as liaisons among state education agencies, legislatures, and state education researchers. Network members convene annually to discuss state and national education policy issues with researchers and policymakers.

SERVE also convenes legislators, state school board members, business partners, and other high-ranking policymakers at an annual education Policy Institute. Past seminars at the Policy Institute have included research on the achievement gap and information on assessing student achievement from the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

"These meetings provide me with a wealth of information," says Richard Lindsey, Chairman of the Ways and Means Education Committee for Alabama.

Looking toward the future, SERVE will continue to support lasting school improvement and reform by providing timely, research-based information through its distinctive "policy presence."

SERVE Regional Problems and Strategies

Problem: Failure of low-performing schools to use promising strategies for closing the achievement gap.

Rationale: Researchers are identifying promising and unsuccessful strategies for closing the achievement gap, but low-performing schools do not have that knowledge.
Strategies for Addressing Problem(s): Work intensively with a low-performing Mississippi district to implement state-approved corrective action plan. Use CSRD schools as models in developing online courses for other schools implementing improvement plans.

Problem: Increasing challenge to recruit, develop, and retain quality teachers and principals.

Rationale: Research confirms the importance of teacher and principal effectiveness to student achievement.
Strategies for Addressing Problem(s): Develop and deliver collaborative leader development programs.

Problem: Need for sound, unbiased education research to inform policymakers' decisions.

Rationale: In policy debate, research competes with conflicting goals and opinions, often misguiding change and leading to ineffective decisions.
Strategies for Addressing Problem(s): Promote use of research-based, unbiased knowledge by conducting policy institutes and colloquia and by having policy analysts work with policymakers and state departments of education.

Problem: Preschool children with characteristics that put them at risk for failure.

Rationale: Research suggests that high-quality early childhood education services can improve student achievement in later grades; such services are integral to school reform.
Strategies for Addressing Problem(s): Develop a comprehensive approach to early childhood education — including research, training and technical assistance, publications, and enhancement of decision making in early childhood.

Problem: High proportion of undereducated adults, suggesting large number of regions' students will struggle to achieve academically.

Rationale: A high percentage of students score below basic level in reading; improved efforts to promote literacy are needed.
Strategies for Addressing Problem(s): Develop a whole-school approach to literacy that cuts across content areas; provide literacy training and technical assistance throughout the region.

Problem: Reliance on short-term, quick-fix strategies in response to high-stakes testing, rather than long-term improvements.

Rationale: Concepts of standards, assessment, and accountability need to be internalized at all levels (state, district, school, teacher, student).
Strategies for Addressing Problem(s): Develop and implement research-based strategies and practices that align standards and assessment.

WestEd is Building Leadership for High-Performing Schools

"With new standards and the push for accountability, everything's changing. There are so many things I need to learn to be a stronger leader," says Ruby James, principal of Eloy Intermediate School (grades 4–6) in Eloy, Arizona, a small rural community some 60 miles south of Phoenix. Eighty percent of the district's 1,392 students are Hispanic, 90 percent on free or reduced lunch. Working with WestEd, James and her school staff have just completed an action plan for improving student performance.

Like many principals of schools where children are not achieving to high standards, James faces the challenge of working with the newest and least experienced teachers. "If they don't have the classroom skills they're at a loss. You get early burnout. Our role is to take the reins and lead those teachers, help them learn the skills they need to teach those kids. But we have to go in knowing, too."

What should today's principals know? What skills do they need to help their teachers transform underperforming schools into high performing learning communities?

Facing the Challenges of Leadership

For Margaret Serna, a second-year principal at an elementary school near Phoenix, these skills range from "being a cheerleader for your school team" to steering staff through "the big job of aligning instruction and school curriculum with state standards." When Serna took over, student test scores were in a downward spiral, there had been five different principals in the previous six years, and staff members were demoralized.

This year with WestEd's help they began implementing their school's three-year improvement plan, which targets reading, and have already seen significant gains in their schoolwide SAT-9 reading scores. "You have to be a change agent that will no longer accept excuses," Serna says. "Our kids are poor? They're minority? Second language learners? We can't change any of that. What we can change is the way we teach them."

While it is encouraging to see a few principals learning to be more effective, the task is broader. Across Arizona and the western region, leadership development is a priority.

"What many are calling a 'crisis in leadership' goes beyond high turnover rates among principals and superintendents," explains Karen Kearney, co-director of WestEd's Leadership Initiative. "Standards-based practice means that school leaders have to learn to work in new ways." Kearney, who also directs the highly successful California School Leadership Academy (CSLA), is talking about core competencies like shaping a culture of high expectations based on a common understanding of quality student work, promoting shared responsibility for school improvement, or using multiple assessments to evaluate student learning. "But preparation for these new competencies," she says, "is hard to come by."

Developing a Leadership Support System

To supply that vital preparation, WestEd is helping Arizona's education community, colleges and universities, and state leaders build an infrastructure that provides sustained professional development for school and district leaders. Drawing on CSLA's decade of accomplishment, this effort focuses on both beginning

and experienced leaders. Three regional training centers to be established across Arizona will serve different cohort groups: principals in low-performing schools, leadership teams from a set of schools, and superintendents and district office staff. All these groups will strengthen their knowledge and skills through a varied approach.

Long-term Learning Seminars will actively engage principals and other leaders in a three-year curriculum. Seasoned leaders acting as facilitators and coaches selected for their specialized expertise will model best practices in three areas: creating an accountability system based on standards, building consensus and resolving conflict, and collaborating with families and community members.

"Just in Time" Issues Forums will engage participants in dialogue and critical analysis around late-breaking issues and topics of critical importance, bringing administrators together to grapple with key problems and share ideas, strategies, and resources.

Information/Networking will help participants use online resources to find exemplary programs, arrange site visitations, and discuss topics like interpreting school-site data.

"We're building the capability of school leaders to share a vision of what learning in a standards-based system looks like for Arizona students," says Kearney, "and to make that system a reality."

A Research and Development Agenda

To support this effort, and similar work in the region's other three states, WestEd is also developing powerful tools and strategies for learning new core leadership skills—tools that include protocols, facilitator training, and video cases that focus on community engagement and guiding standards-based practice. WestEd is also evaluating how technology can expand the range and effectiveness of professional development among school leaders.

"WestEd has been incredible," says Margaret Serna. "They brought us back to what's important—goals for children. The leadership skills that really matter are those that lead to better teaching and learning." The aim of WestEd's five-year R&D effort is not only to better understand what it takes to help busy administrators become better educational leaders. The aim is also to learn how to take that quality professional development to scale, to develop an ongoing system that will help hundreds of leaders like Serna and James.

WestEd Regional Problems and Strategies

Problem: Pressure placed on low-performing schools by standards-based accountability systems. Need for support as Western states refine assessments and accountability systems.

Rationale: Standards-based accountability systems encounter many barriers: lack of coherence across state, district, and school levels; poor alignment across standards, assessments, and accountability measures; inadequate support for students, teachers, and administrators.
Strategies for Addressing Problem(s): Help policymakers create coherent systems aligned at state and local levels; strengthen capacity of educators at all levels to use that system. Inform policy and strengthen systems by providing expert policy assistance, producing Policy Briefs, and convening stakeholders. Develop tools and processes that promote and support use of data to guide decision-making.

Problem: Difficulty recruiting and supporting well-qualified leaders, especially in urban areas.

Rationale: Preparation is inadequate for new core competencies: guiding school communities in setting common high standards, helping teachers use student work diagnostically to plan instruction, and promoting collective action to improve student performance.
Strategies for Addressing Problem(s): Create infrastructures providing high-quality professional development for school and district leaders. Develop tools and strategies to help leaders learn core skills. Promote new forms of distributed leadership that make the job of leadership more "doable."

Problem: Need for improved knowledge, skill, and effectiveness of teachers, especially in hard-to-staff under-performing schools.

Rationale: Educators do not receive adequate initial preparation, effective induction support, or coherent, ongoing learning opportunities necessary to improve student performance.
Strategies for Addressing Problem(s): Ensure that a coordinated system supports the professional growth of classroom teachers through all stages of their careers. Develop multimedia products and processes to help teachers learn to work more effectively with English language learners.

Problem: Need for a comprehensive approach to community renewal for schools and the broader community

Rationale: Educational success requires reversing the effects of poverty by rebuilding neighborhoods into safe, thriving, and desirable places that support families to live, work, raise and educate their children.
Strategies for Addressing Problem(s): Work in partnership with a community to create a comprehensive approach to support children by strengthening families, schools, and other community institutions. Develop specific processes to enhance effectiveness and health of local service agencies and outreach to families.

RELs Network for Success

The Regional Educational Laboratory system provides a powerful national educational network. The labs collaborate to make the most of their knowledge, experience, and expertise to develop and deliver products and services that benefit educators, and in turn, students across the nation. In recent years the labs have collaborated with other labs and/or with the Department of Education on projects and products that have a national audience, such as:

The National Awards Program for Model Professional Development
This ongoing program identifies and recognizes exemplary professional development programs at the district level as well as exemplary preservice programs. The labs worked in conjunction with the U.S. Secretary of Education to engineer and implement the two programs and created a series of products to communicate lessons learned from the award-winning schools and institutions of higher education.

Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) Program
The CSRD program was initiated in 1998 to jump-start whole school reform. It provided an excellent opportunity for low-performing schools and districts to begin the process of whole school reform, but it also raised many questions. To help start the program, the labs partnered with the state education agencies to draft the competition guidelines and to provide workshops and regionally tailored resources to help schools and districts make wise choices about school reform. The labs also collaborated to produce tools with a national audience, such as the *Catalog of School Reform Models*, *Making Good Choices*, and the CSRD Awards Database at http://www.sedl.org/csrd/awards.html. The database contains information on all grants awarded through the CSRD program. It is being used by schools, researchers, model developers, and policymakers.

All of these efforts helped ensure the success of CSRD and contributed to the nationwide discussion of what is needed to improve student achievement.

Pulling Together: R&D Resources for Rural Schools
Pulling Together consists of a Web site and information resources produced by the national REL network that features research and development resources for rural educators. The Web site, which may be accessed at http://www.ncrel.org/rural/, discusses a range of issues that face rural schools and districts, including the effectiveness of rural schools, community and family partnerships, technological resources for rural schools, and development of leadership and teacher evaluation systems. It is just one of many REL resources that help rural educators, who are often isolated and unable to access service providers, address tough problems.

The Laboratory Network Program
Yet another way the RELs collaborate is through structured Laboratory Network Program (LNP) activities. During this contract period, the LNP will focus on sharing what is learned in the RELs' work about transforming low-performing schools into high-performing learning communities. Eight critical areas have been identified that should be considered in supporting such transformations. These include:

- assessment and accountability
- teaching and learning
- resources
- family and community connections
- leadership
- student diversity
- staff
- school culture and organization

The RELs are currently preparing a synthesis for each framework component and will create a database to include products and exemplary programs for each. The database will include products and programs from current and past REL work as well as others' work.

National Leadership Areas

Under the 2000-2005 contract with the U.S. Department of Education, each lab has developed a national leadership area that is focused on a particular educational issue important to the transformation of low-performing schools into high-performing learning communities. This leadership role involves synthesizing and disseminating research-based information on a national level, and providing cross-Laboratory training to ensure that up-to-date research and development is available in every region. Each lab is required to pay particular attention to the needs of schools with high concentrations of low-income students, schools in rural areas, and schools with broad language and cultural diversity.

The work of each REL's national leadership area is described on the following five pages.

AEL: Unlocking New Technologies for Tomorrow's Students

Ask the technology innovators at AEL what their work is all about, and they might fire back an eight-word reply: "transforming ordinary technologies into extraordinary tools for learning." Guided by a national board of advisors, they work with high-tech companies to develop and test educational applications of emerging technologies, particularly those that appear in sectors outside of education. The "greenhouse" in which new hybrids are grown is The Institute for the Advancement of Emerging Technologies in Education (IAETE), directed by Dr. Tammy McGraw. The work of AEL's national leadership area is being housed within the Institute.

IAETE (www.iaete.org) is committed to providing unbiased, research-based information not only to the education community but to product developers in the education market. Research needs to be conducted with specific educational applications of the technology in mind. New devices must be carefully aligned with professional development, support mechanisms, and strategies for effective use. Technologies that can help all learners achieve must be identified, studied, and cultivated. The Institute is looking at the implementation of new technologies in standards-based curricula to gain insight into how the technologies might address individual learning styles, cultural and linguistic diversity, needs of children with disabilities, and geographic or temporal barriers. Researchers work in several intensive sites--real schools that face a variety of real challenges.

The Institute is partnering with organizations such as AT&T Research Labs, Virginia Tech, Digimarc Embedding Institute, Knowledge Management Software, Inc., Interactive Design and Development, and Biocentric Solutions to achieve its mission.

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LAB at Brown University: A Collaborative Vision for Equity and Diversity

With students from many different cultures in America's classrooms, how can teachers help all learners meet high expectations? The answer begins with collaboration, asserts Maria Pacheco, director for Equity and Diversity programs at the Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University (LAB). "Among the organizations committed to equity in education, none is an expert in everything affecting diverse student populations," she says. "We must work together."

The LAB builds upon strategies developed in schools and districts and upon 25 years of work by the Education Alliance, a division of Brown that promotes equity and excellence for all learners. The LAB's focus, "Effective Education for English Language Learners," was also the theme of its 2001 national conference. The LAB is applying lessons learned from intensive professional development with teachers of English language learners to develop a Diversity Kit that engages teachers in inquiry about culturally responsive practice. With the National Association of Bilingual Education (NABE), the LAB created the Portraits of Success Web site modeling exemplary bilingual education programs. This year, the LAB launched a user-friendly site, Teaching Diverse Learners, where educators share and access information about effective teaching and learning.

To implement its strategies, the LAB works with other RELs, U.S. Department of Education programs including the Office of Civil Rights, state agencies, and other nonprofits that advance equity: NABE, the National Association of Multicultural Education, and the National Council of Educational Equity. Pacheco notes, "Through this forward-looking, collaborative approach we can improve equity in schools."

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LSS: Fostering Strong Leadership for School Reform

"Strong leadership is the key to restoring the public's confidence in our education system," said Dr. JoAnn Manning, executive director of the Laboratory for Student Success (LSS). LSS will concentrate its work over the next five years on helping education leaders meet the challenges involved in strengthening schools to meet the needs of all students. Particular emphasis will be given to help leaders improve teacher quality, integrate technology, develop school-family connections, and sustain comprehensive school improvement.

Though small geographically, the mid-Atlantic region is large in population and diverse in economic and social conditions. It is home to some of the wealthiest and best-educated people in the nation, along with some of the very poorest and least educated, many of whom live in inner-city ghettos and high-poverty rural areas. LSS will spearhead the effort in the mid-Atlantic region to foster educational leadership through leadership development workshops and institutes that incorporate best practices.

LSS will scale up these regional efforts as well as its past research and development work on school reform and its work with the Mid-Atlantic Network of Superintendents and Deans. The lab will partner nationally with other research organizations and universities including the Council for Basic Education, Fairleigh Dickinson University, and the Educational Research Service to sponsor national events and publications.

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McREL: National Dialogue Shares Success of Standards-based Education

For over a decade, McREL has been in the forefront of research, practice, and evaluation related to standards-based education. During this time, standards-based reform—a movement that arose from a public concern about the need to establish ambitious learning goals for all students—has become mired in division, polarization, and politicization. In response, McREL is attempting to raise the quality and productivity of public discourse on education reform. The cornerstone of McREL's strategy for developing the national leadership area of standards-based instructional practice is facilitating an ongoing and Web-supported national conversation on education, known as the National Dialogue on Standards-based Education.

The purpose of the National Dialogue is to move the country beyond debate and contention to a point where the public can begin to share success stories and ways to use standards-based reforms to benefit all students. The National Dialogue will take place over the next two years and be a collective, cumulative process. The National Dialogue Web site (www.nationaldialogue.org) will serve as both an information repository for the Dialogue and a forum where participants take part in ongoing, real-time, "virtual" dialogues. Through real and virtual sessions, McREL will gather lessons and insights about standards to inform a national "mid-course review" of standards.

The initiating event of the Dialogue was held April 19–21, 2001, in Kansas City, Missouri. It was a collaborative effort among McREL, NCREL, the Berkana Institute, and the Coalition for Community Collaboration in Kansas City, Missouri. State-level events are being planned in the Central Region in partnership with state education agencies and in Colorado with the Colorado Parent Teachers Association, the Public Education Business Coalition, and the Colorado Association of School Boards.

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NCREL: Tapping the Potential of Technology

NCREL

As rapidly as technology has become a part of daily life, teachers are having trouble keeping up. "Most schools have the computers they need," says NCREL Deputy Director Gilbert Valdez, "but they are now faced with the challenge of how to use them effectively in their everyday teaching." At the heart of NCREL's applied research and development, networking, and dissemination work lies the vision that integrating technology into instruction will help teachers teach and students learn.

NCREL has set the pace in adjusting to changes in education as a result of technology, by emphasizing the impact of technology on student learning. From the development of the highly successful Pathways to School Improvement in the early days of the Web, to its recently launched data-driven tools, enGauge and EdSTAR, NCREL has proven its commitment to innovation and excellence. In June 2001, NCREL hosted the highly successful National Educational Technology Conference, entitled "High-Performance, High-Technology Learning Communities: Preparing Our Students for the Future."

NCREL is working with a wide range of partners to build capacity and better integrate technology into schools, including Mahnomen Public Schools on the White Earth Indian Reservation in northern Minnesota. NCREL also partners with the North Central Mathematics and Science Consortium and the North Central Regional Technology in Education Consortium to provide technical assistance to state education agencies, intermediate units, and school districts across the region.

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NWREL: Re-engineering Schools for Success

"Schools with very little capacity for improvement are being asked to make extreme changes to improve learning for students who have high levels of need with a minimum of support," says Dr. Robert E. Blum, director of NWREL's School Improvement Program and national leadership initiative in Re-engineering Schools. Re-engineering schools is the process of using research to plan, implement, and sustain the capacity to achieve high levels of learning for all students. Re-engineering schools addresses solutions to two interrelated problems:

- Districts and schools need focused, coherent efforts that improve student learning.
- Schools most in need of improvement lack support to apply research-based practices daily.

Building on its 20-year national record, NWREL's work in re-engineering schools is being carried out in three main components—research-synthesis products, direct support to schools, and dissemination.

Re-engineering successes will be captured in NWREL's Learning by Example series; a national forum will bring together diverse people for deep dialogue on significant issues related to re-engineering schools and districts; and regional institutes and on-site assistance to school systems will support re-engineering initiatives.

Products and services to support re-engineering will be accomplished through collaborations that include the National Clearinghouse for Comprehensive School Reform, the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, the Consortium for Policy Research in Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, the Council of Chief State School Officers, the American Association of School Administrators, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the National Association of Secondary School Principals and state affiliates, and Regional Educational Laboratories.

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PREL: Putting Reading First

The need for effective reading instruction has been identified as an absolute priority by schools and communities across the nation. Pacific Resources for Education and Learning's (PREL's) focus on reading builds on its previous work in literacy and reflects national educational goals as stated in Title 1, the Reading Excellence Act, and its successor, Reading First. PREL's approach to improving reading instruction focuses on the design and creation of an interactive, user-friendly Web site geared toward a national audience interested in early-reading issues.

PREL is developing the Web site for teachers and other educators who seek up-to-date research and research-based practices in early-reading instruction including resources related to English-language learners. Users will be guided through a virtual reference interview similar to what they would experience if they consulted a real-life librarian. The system will accept natural-language questions, match the queries to the resources in a database, and then present the user with the most appropriate materials.

Because reading is such a broad topic, and because all the laboratories in the REL Network are concerned with literacy in some way, PREL will collaborate with each lab to select and review materials for inclusion in the Web site's database. Experts from federally funded research centers, like the Center for Improvement of Early Reading Achievement and the National Research Center on English Learning & Achievement, and from national professional organizations, like the International Reading Association, will provide guidance and serve as resource reviewers. By utilizing the best expertise and providing a rich—yet focused—resource the site will take the frustration out of searching the Web for help with early-reading instruction.

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SEDL: National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools Focuses on Student Achievement

Although schools nationwide are tapping into their communities for support, many family/community involvement programs do not increase student achievement or support school improvement efforts.

"Unless schools, families, and communities work together to address student achievement, their efforts will be too fragmented to have significant impact on low-performing schools," explains Cathy Jordan, director of the National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools (NCFCCS). "Schools, policymakers, and community groups must be knowledgeable about strategies and tools for family and community involvement, and be able to assess which of these would be most successful locally."

Based at the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL), the Center is drawing on the lab's years of experience in developing and sustaining school, family, and community partnerships. It aims to increase meaningful family and community involvement in public schools to raise student achievement.

NCFCCS is developing a procedural knowledge base for schools, communities and families to access. Center staff are synthesizing available research, building an online database of research and resources and compiling indicator data to determine the effectiveness of different strategies.

Joining the Center's network to disseminate the latest research and practices are organizations with strong, varied backgrounds in family and community involvement. These include the Dana Center at The University of Texas-Austin; the Johns Hopkins Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships; the National Center for Early Development and Learning at University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill; Parents for Public Schools; and Public Education Network.

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SERVE: Improving Student Learning Through Expanded Learning Opportunity Programs

SERVE

In spite of nearly a decade of school reform efforts, many low-performing schools are still in trouble, and an achievement gap persists. Expanded learning opportunity programs—such as preschool programs and after-school programs—are one solution. These "extra" learning opportunities can provide low achievers individualized attention and help with academic subjects. "Expanded learning opportunity programs provide schools the opportunity to try new approaches, to reach students that aren't reached during the traditional school day," says Catherine Scott-Little, project director for SERVE's Expanded Opportunities Leadership Project.

SERVE's vision for expanded learning opportunities is that schools see regular school day and "out of school" learning opportunities as a continuum, with early childhood and school-age expanded learning opportunities as an integral part of school reform. SERVE's extensive experience with research and technical assistance in schools and other learning programs provides a foundation for the expanded learning opportunities work. Building on work in the areas of early childhood education, best practices in promoting continuity between learning programs, "hands-on" work with schools, and direct experience providing migrant and after-school services for children, SERVE provides resources and leadership to promote quality expanded learning programs.

Partnerships with a variety of organizations are essential to these efforts because expanded learning programs cut across age categories, service providers, and research literatures. Collaboration with other RELs, U.S. Department of Education programs (such as the 21st Century Community Learning Program), research centers (such as the National Center for Early Development and Learning), professional associations, state departments, and local districts is necessary to promote quality learning programs at the national, regional, state, and local level.

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WestEd: Assessing Educational Achievement

WestEd

As policymakers and educators across the nation strive to create school accountability systems based on rigorous academic standards and assessments, they confront a host of issues. "Many high-stakes testing systems are out of balance," explains Stanley Rabinowitz, director of WestEd's Assessment and Standards Development Program. "Even at their best, statewide tests capture only a portion of what we expect schools to do." WestEd's national leadership work in assessment focuses on this and other compelling issues faced by teachers, administrators, and policymakers: aligning assessments with standards, the technical adequacy of different forms of assessment, efficiency that distributes the burden of assessment across grades and schools, technology as an assessment tool, and examination of the intended and unintended effects of assessment and accountability policies.

Drawing on a more than a decade of assistance to states like California and Kentucky in their high-stakes student assessment systems, as well as ongoing work in more than 20 states, WestEd is bringing together quarterly a national group of assessment and accountability specialists. In collaboration with this National Assessment Work Group, WestEd will (a) synthesize what is already known about key issues in a series of Knowledge Briefs, (b) identify the most relevant knowledge gaps and research those gaps, and (c) explore solutions to critical problems. The focus in year one is high-stakes testing.

An annual assessment conference will be co-hosted each fall with the National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment. Other partners in this work include universities; organizations like the Council of Chief State Schools Officers and the National Council for Measurement in Education; assessment support providers like the Assessment Training Institute; and the national research center, CRESST.

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RELs Strive for High-Quality Research and Development

Each regional lab has a quality assurance process that will ensure the highest possible quality of work and products through internal and external reviews. Each lab's process takes into account the alignment of research, development, and technical assistance with its region's critical needs. The quality assurance process also includes criteria and procedures for the design and methodology of development and applied research initiatives and for a quality assurance review of all products.

Representatives of the RELs and the Office of Educational Research and Improvement collaboratively establish indicators to gauge the effectiveness of the RELs. These indicators vary slightly from one funding cycle to the next, depending on the specific contract requirements. The specific indicators for 2001–2005 are shown in the table below. Data on these indicators are currently being collected for 2001. Summary data for parallel indicators for the previous contract (i.e., 1997,1998, 1999, and first nine months of 2000) also are reported to demonstrate the strong perfomance of the RELs historically.

Regional Educational Laboratories Performance Indicators

Indicator: Number of Development and Implementation Sites

Current Contract: An increasing number of local or state sites engaged in collaborative development and demonstration of a range of reform efforts will show improved practice over time.
Previous Contract: The number of development and demonstration sites increased 27.5 percent, from 494 in 1997 to 630 in 2000.

Indicator: Student Achievement

Current Contract: School sites receiving intensive laboratory assistance will show increases in student achievement over time.
Previous Contract: Student achievement data was available from about 22.0 percent of REL sites for 2000 only. Student achievement goals were reported in 57.6 percent fo these sites.

Indicator: Customer Receipt of Products and Services and Field Utility and Impact

Current Contract: The cumulative circulation of products, receipt of services, and receipt of electronic materials will increase annually, and at least 90% of clients sampled will report laboratory products and services to have utility and impact in the field.
Previous Contract: The number of products distributed to clients totaled 5,176,004, the number of face-to-tace services totaled $80,200, and the number of web site hits totaled 97,347,537.

Indicator: Quality of Products and Services and Their Impact on Research and Development

Current Contract: At least 90% of clients sampled will report laboratory products and services to be of high quality, and laboratories will increasingly advance knowledge of educational research and development.
Previous Contract: Laboratory products and services were rated to be of excellent or good quality by 84.3 – 90.1 percent of sampled clients each year.

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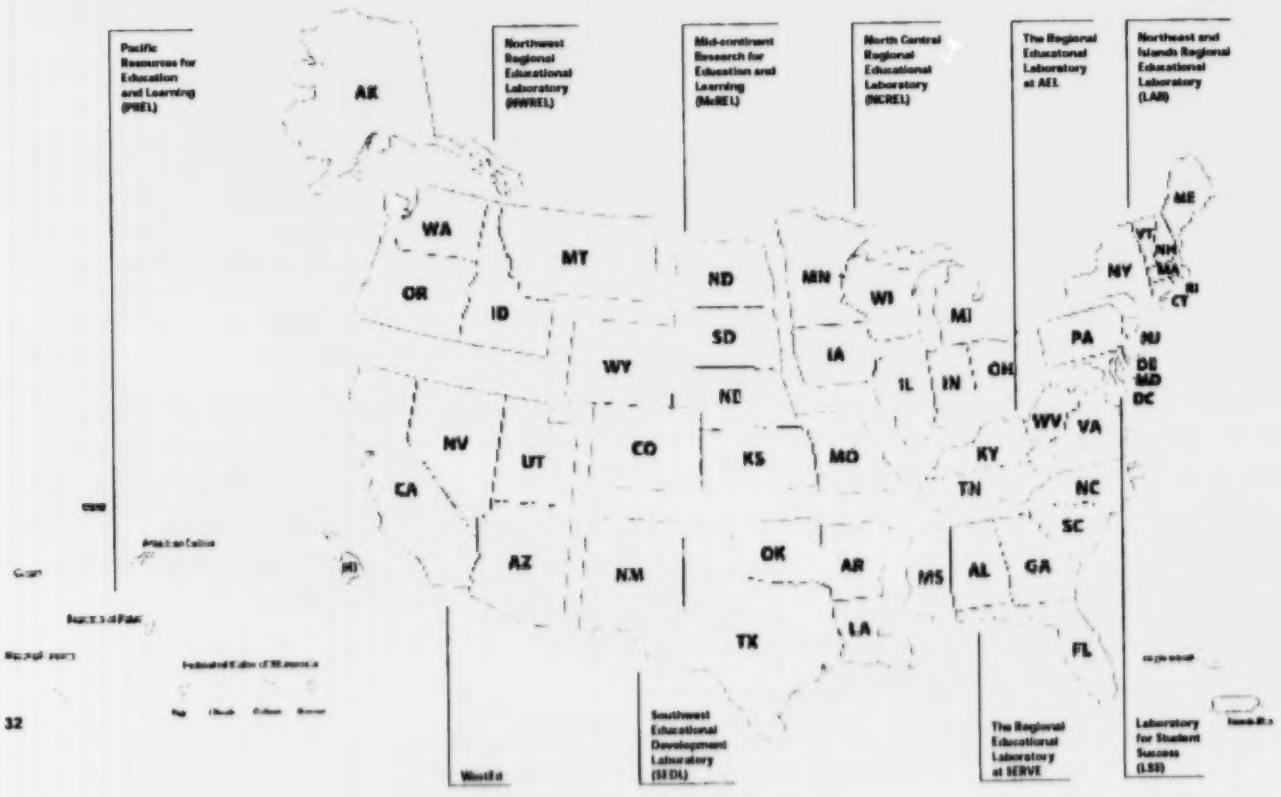

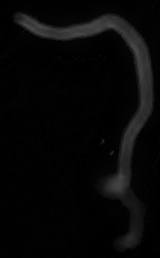

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